

THE verbs are likewise to be distinguished according to their qualities, as actives from neuters; the neglect of which has already introduced some barbarities in our conversation, which, if not obviated by just animadversions, may in time creep into our writings.

THUS, my Lord, will our language be laid down, distinct in its minutest subdivisions, and resolved into its elemental principles. And who upon this survey can forbear to wish, that these fundamental atoms of our speech might obtain the firmness and immutability of the primogenial and constituent particles of matter, that they might retain their substance while they alter their appearance; and be varied and compounded, yet not destroyed.

BUT this is a privilege which words are scarcely to expect; for, like their author, when they are not gaining strength, they are generally losing it. Though art may sometimes prolong their duration, it will rarely give them perpetuity, and their changes will be almost always informing us, that language is the work of man, of a being from whom permanence and stability cannot be derived.

WORDS having been hitherto considered as separate and unconnected, are now to be likewise examined

as they are ranged in their various relations by the rules of SYNTAX or construction, I do not know that any regard has been yet paid in English dictionaries, and in which the grammarian can give little assistance. The syntax of this language is too inconstant to be reduced to rules, and is only learned by the distinct consideration of particular words as they are used by the best authors. We say, according to the present modes of expression, the soldier died *of* his wounds, and the sailor perished *with* hunger; and every man acquainted with our language would be offended by a change of particles, which yet seem originally assigned by nature, there being no reason to be drawn from grammar to reason why a man may not, with equal propriety, be said to dye *with* a wound, or perish *of* hunger.

OUR syntax therefore is not to be taught by general rules, but by special precedents; and in examining whether Addison has been with justice censured for a solecism in this passage,

The poor inhabitant-----

Starves in the midst of nature's bounty  
And in the laden vineyard *dies for thirst*

it is not in our power to have recourse to established laws of speech, but we must remark that writers of former ages have used the same words, and consider whether he can be acquitted of impropriety.